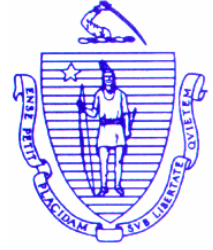




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**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Commercial Lobster Permit Holders

**FROM:** Paul Diodati, Director

**DATE:** May 6, 2003

**SUBJECT:** Upcoming Public Hearings for Proposed State-wide Lobster Effort Control Plan .

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The Division of Marine Fisheries (*MarineFisheries*) will be proposing its state-wide effort control plan at two public hearings: Tuesday, May 27<sup>th</sup> at the Gloucester High School and Thursday, May 29<sup>th</sup> at the Taunton Holiday Inn. **Please note that the May 27<sup>th</sup> public hearing will start at 6PM and the May 29<sup>th</sup> public hearing will be start at 10 AM, not 7 PM as previously noted.** Enclosed with this mailing is an executive summary of the proposed plan. The full document: "Consideration of an Effort Control Plan for the Massachusetts Commercial Lobster Fishery" is available on our website at [www.mass.gov/marinefisheries](http://www.mass.gov/marinefisheries).

The Commonwealth is required by Addendum III to Amendment 3 of the ASFMC Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for American lobster to cap and reduce effort by 25% in the Outer Cape Cod (OCC) Area. Effort control plans were proposed by fishermen in other areas and consequently we feel a state-wide effort control plan is warranted to prevent effort expansion into Area 1, the state's most important fishing area. A practical, coastwide effort control plan that effectively controls the number of traps fished at current levels for all seven management areas (LMAs), not just in Massachusetts, would be a sensible action.

Increased fishing effort from within the lobster fishery is also expected in the near future due to the current age distribution of lobstermen and the expectation for permit transfers by many aging fishermen who are soon to retire. Staff analysis shows that permit transfers generally lead to a substantive increase in effort relative to the history of the prior permit holder in an attempt to generate revenue to offset the new owner's investment.

Keep in mind that we are at a crossroads in fisheries management, with several fisheries undergoing severe regulatory actions, and a shift in effort not just within the lobster fishery but from other fisheries into the lobster fishery is expected. The most notable fishery that will see an exodus is the multispecies groundfish fishery that is expected to suffer severe cuts in fishing opportunities when the New England Fisheries Management Council enacts Amendment #13 by May of 2004. Industry watchers expect a combination of area closures and reductions in federally issued Days-at-Sea that will force more fishermen out of the groundfish fishery. Furthermore, competition for fish in certain quota-driven fisheries (sea bass, tautog, striped bass, scup, and summer flounder) will force fishermen dependent on these species to seek alternatives or motivate them to become more reliant on lobster fishing. Combined with the lobster fisheries' internal shifts in effort, the outlook for an uncontrolled increase in lobster effort is highly probable.

Working with the Commonwealth's commercial fishermen, Marine Fisheries Commission, interstate and federal colleagues, *Marine Fisheries* staff remains dedicated to the assurance of a healthy and viable lobster fishery for the years to come. Throughout the ASMFC Lobster Conservation Management Team process the Massachusetts lobster industry has shown that they are responsible users of the resource by actively participating to construct a fishing plan to conserve fish stocks. *Marine Fisheries* has been pleased to continue this work alongside such dedicated individuals to the betterment of the Commonwealth's most valuable fishery and will continue to develop effective and enforceable measures for implementation in state waters.